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LES ORAISONS

EDGARD MAXENCE

AWARDED FIRST PRIZE, PARIS SALON, 1914

## A NOTE ON THE PARIS SALON OF 1914

BY CLARENCE STRATTON

THE *Salon* of 1914 at Paris was distinctly better this year than last; in fact, it almost reached the level of 1912, which was all the more distinctive because it came after such a long stretch of lean years. The hundreds of canvases have been carried away,—where? In the answers to that single question lie the tragedies of scores of ambitions, hundreds of blasted hopes. Perhaps many of the disappointed enthusiasts turn their skill to the comic papers, for each year the *Salon des Humoristes* grows steadily

better and more varied. In it dozens of pictures are much better done than hundreds in the two formal *salons*, where practically the only professed humorist is Guillaume, who paints young tango dancers, late arrivals at the theater, a torn-up Paris street; but so skilfully adds to his satirical subjects the technique of a good painter that his canvases always hang in the *Salon des Beaux Arts*.

Another outlet for the unsuccessful—either from the points of view of sale or notice—is to choose some markedly in-

dividual trait, and "work it for all it is worth." Thus is accounted for the change from the Matisse drawings and sketches in the *Petit Palais* to the Futurist Exhibition last year and this in Munich. There can be no quarreling with the idea of finding some different, some individual class of subject, some new manner of treatment, and then developing it to its fullest. Art can only be judged by its result. If the finished picture is a "success," well and good; unfortunately, the result is often a horror.

Recent *salons* have illustrated this fact quite clearly. There had been thousands of canvases of French interiors, of floating swans and gushing fountains, of Watteau-like gardens, of coaches containing be-wigged and be-coated cavaliers; everywhere they made one yawn. Then came Gaston Latouche, and all the world stood gaping, still, transfixed, even in its *ennui*, by an attack of surprised interest. So many of these canvases have been in America that they look like charming old friends, but it was delightful to find them all in one place at the *salon* in a special exhibition of Latouche's work.

Recent prize winners have also shown the value of doing one thing well. Long before M. Paul Chabas won the coveted first prize with his "September Morn" he had prepared himself to deserve it by painting several canvases in the same style. In the *Petit Palais* there is a group of bathing children, delicate as the tints of coming dawn. In the Luxembourg there is the beautiful girl with the weeds in her hands. But both these paintings, charming as are the conception and composition, display rather prominent yellows. With this almost entirely eliminated, "September Morn" glows like the tints in mother-of-pearl.

This year M. Edgard Maxence won first prize by a picture in the field for which he has become known. He has chosen to depict a religious aspect of life, but not a modern phase. It must be a long time since he painted the badly named "Angelus" of the *Petit Palais*, in which a young woman kneels in a flat landscape bounded by long lines of thin-

stemmed trees. Even in this early canvas there appears a picturesque, medieval detail: the leather-bound, metal-decorated old missal in her lap. There is a strong, vigorous color tone; full, rich tints adding to this sense of the fullness behind the mere figure.

In order to emphasize this feeling of fullness, of history, M. Maxence next put his figures into church. In "*Le Livre de Paix*" two young women of the thirteenth century stand before a lectern. Their gracefully draped high white head-dresses and their softly falling robes are bathed in the softened hues of the sun descending through mellow stained-glass windows. Behind them is an ornate grill. Turning to the prize-winning canvas of the 1914 *salon*, one finds all these previously cited elements judiciously combined. The prayers of the two maidens are emphasized by less elaborate headkerchiefs, by higher necked dresses, by two rosaries, and three books of devotion. While the grill in this painting has become more austere, the robes have become more regal, softer, fursleeved; and the stained-glass windows are deeper, warmer in tone. There was a distinctive charm about this canvas among all the nudes, the still life, the Breton funerals, the pseudo-antiques, the soldiers, the orientals, which make of the Paris *salon* a kaleidoscopic phantasmagoria.

Edwin H. Blashfield has recently completed a large mural painting entitled "The Victor" for the Mercersburg Academy. "The Victor" is represented by a Mercersburg boy, wearing the regulation track suit of the academy. "The Angel of Victory" is placing the olive crown of the Olympiad on his head. At one side is Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and self-control, and on the other is Hermes, the Greek god of music and athletic skill. The Olympic games were sacred to this god. The tripods, which appear in the picture, were formally dedicated by the Greeks at the Olympiad. The painting, which has been installed in the trophy room of the academy, is the gift of E. W. Bok, editor of *The Ladies' Home Journal*.